

(Washington, DC)— “Today I pay tribute to a constituent of mine who was one of our nation’s true civil rights pioneers: Dr. James Cameron graced Milwaukee with his work for justice and equality for over 50 years, and his efforts were felt by the nation.

“Out of his singular experience of being the only known survivor of a lynching at the age of 16, he built a life and legacy dedicated to the eradication of racism, the preservation of African-American history, and the advancement of civil rights for all. Having seen his friends brutally murdered by a mob of thousands, having felt the rope around his neck and faced his own seemingly inevitable murder, Dr. Cameron could have merely thanked God for the miracle of having been spared and gone on to live a quiet, private life.

“Instead he courageously embraced the call to work publicly, despite the risks to his own safety, in order to secure full equality for all. Dr. Cameron went on to found three NAACP chapters in Indiana during the 1940s, and served as the Indiana State Director of Civil Liberties from 1942-1950, investigating over 25 civil rights violation cases. Upon returning to Wisconsin, he continued his civil rights work and played a role in protests to end segregated housing in Milwaukee.

“Dr. Cameron endeavored to use the lessons of an ugly violent chapter in our nation’s past to build a foundation for real unity. He realized this vision in 1988 with the opening of America’s Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee, a museum that continues to document the devastating effects of slavery, lynching, and racial violence.

“The Black Holocaust Museum has helped both black AND white Americans learn about and reconcile this part of our history. At this time it is so important to support the Black Holocaust Museum financially, and it is incumbent upon our community to make sure this institution lasts.

“I am saddened today, but also filled with joy because Dr. Cameron’s time here exemplified a life worth living. He taught us to be better, not bitter—even though it would have been very easy for him to succumb to a life of anger after surviving such a violent and hateful experience.

“He believed that if Americans learned the truth about the racist events in our history, then we

would have a better chance to relegate racism to the past. Dr. Cameron exemplifies the imperative of the civil rights struggle: the call to listen to our humanity over and above our fear.”

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